United Nations S/PV.8405

Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8405th meeting

Monday, 19 November 2018, 10 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Ma Zhaoxu	(China)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mrs. Cordova Soria
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Adom
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Esono Mbengono
	Ethiopia	Mr. Amde
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Umarov
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mr. Van Oosterom
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Clay
	United States of America	Mrs. Haley

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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18-38644 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

Mr. Mladenov is joining the meeting via video-teleconference from Jerusalem.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: In recent days, we have witnessed another dangerous escalation of violence in Gaza that risked unleashing an armed conflict with catastrophic consequences for 2 million impoverished Palestinians — people who live under the control of Hamas and have endured three wars and crippling Israeli closures. The Secretary-General warned that a new war in Gaza would bring forth another unbearable tragedy and urged all parties to exercise maximum restraint. My team and I worked closely with Egypt and all concerned parties to ensure a return to the 2014 ceasefire arrangements. Thankfully, a precarious restoration of calm has now been achieved. We must all work to ensure that this calm is maintained.

The period of 11 to 13 November saw one of the fiercest exchanges of fire since the 2014 Gaza conflict. The escalation was triggered by an operation Israel Defense Forces (IDF) inside the Gaza Strip in which a local commander of Hamas Al-Qassam Brigades and six other Palestinians were killed. One IDF officer was also killed and a second injured in an incident. In the following two days, militants in Gaza launched some 450 rockets and mortars at Israel, including at the towns of Ashkelon, Sderot and Netivot, killing one Palestinian civilian and seriously wounding one Israeli civilian. An IDF soldier was also seriously wounded by a targeted anti-tank guided-missile strike on a bus transporting military personnel in Kfar Aza. The IDF responded in turn with a series of air strikes on 160 militant targets, including a Hamas-affiliated television station and a hotel, resulting in the killing seven Palestinians — at least four identified by the Israeli army as members of armed groups.

The fragility of the situation underscores the urgent need to fundamentally change the dynamics on the ground that address the underlying political issues. Two million Palestinians in Gaza cannot be held hostage to political grandstanding and brinkmanship. Their lives matter and they deserve real leadership that addresses the real problems of Gaza.

The latest outbreak of violence came just as the United Nations and its partners were intensifying efforts to alleviate Gaza's deepening humanitarian and economic crises and, critically, to provide space for ongoing Egyptian-led efforts to advance intra-Palestinian reconciliation. This is essential to ending the occupation and resolving the wider political conflict.

Significant headway has already been made on the implementation of the package of urgent interventions endorsed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians at its September meeting, held in New York. In October, the United Nations started importing and monitoring the delivery of donor-funded fuel to Gaza's power station. This resulted in the greatest supply of electricity since March 2017 — a minimum of 11 hours per day. I reiterate the United Nations sincere gratitude to the Government of the State of Qatar for the generous funding to this end.

The impact has been immediate. Water supply has increased, the risk of sewage overflow has been reduced, hospitals are less dependent on precarious generators, street lights are on again, children can study and play, and families have more cash in hand to meet their daily needs. These improvements, however, are temporary. They provide much-needed relief, but can do little to reverse the long-standing, structural problems affecting Gaza, driven by years of crippling closures and Hamas control.

The implementation of the other urgent humanitarian interventions in Gaza must also be expedited. My team and I will continue to engage with the Palestinian Government, donors and partners on the ground to support several initiatives. These include finding a sustainable solution to Gaza's electricity and health problems, increasing the supply of potable

water and medical supplies, and sewage treatment. These should take place alongside concerted efforts to rescue the economy through cash-for-work and other emergency measures.

Yet, the international community cannot bear the burden of addressing Gaza's problems alone. The primary responsibility falls on the parties themselves. The clock on intra-Palestinian reconciliation is ticking. I urge all Palestinian parties to not waste time and engage in earnest and achieve visible progress in the coming six months. This is in the interests of the Palestinian people. It is in the interests of peace. The success of international efforts in Gaza depends on the parties' willingness to confront the inevitable hurdles, withstand the internal political consequences and stay committed to the reconciliation process over the long term. If any side fails, every side fails.

Hamas and militant groups must stop all provocations and attacks. Israel must significantly improve the movement and access of goods and people to and from Gaza as a step towards the lifting of the closures, in line with resolution 1860 (2009). The Palestinian Authority must strengthen its engagement in Gaza, which is an integral part of the Palestinian territory.

In earlier incidents, before the most recent escalation on 26 and 27 October, 34 rockets were launched by Palestinian Islamic Jihad towards Israel. In response, the IDF targeted 95 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad military sites across the Strip. A hospital in the vicinity of one of the targets was damaged, as were several homes in Gaza City. On 28 October, the IDF struck and killed three Palestinian children aged 13 to 15 in the southern Gaza Strip, who they said were placing improvised explosive devices at the security fence — a claim refuted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights. Protests the next day saw some 3,000 participants, with 1 Palestinian killed and another 15 injured by IDF live fire.

I remain very concerned by Israel's persistent use of live fire against protesters. I call on the authorities to exercise maximum restraint and refrain from using lethal force, except as a last resort. I also urge Hamas and other Palestinian militants to end the indiscriminate firing of rockets into southern Israel and to stop all violence near the fence, including attempts to breach it.

Overall in the reporting period, Israeli security forces killed 31 Palestinians in Gaza, including four children. One IDF soldier was killed during the 11 November operation. Meanwhile, in the occupied West Bank, Israeli security forces killed four Palestinians. On 22 October, Israeli security forces shot and killed a Palestinian man in Hebron after he was reported to have stabbed and injured an Israeli soldier. Three other attempts against Israeli civilians or Israeli security forces personnel were reported near the Kiryat Arba and Kfar Adumim settlements on 5 and 6 November, and in Jerusalem on 14 November. On 24 October, a 21-year-old Palestinian man was shot and killed by the IDF during clashes following an IDF weapons search near Tubas in the northern West Bank. On 26 October, in the context of clashes between Israeli settlers and Palestinians near Ramallah, Israeli security forces shot and killed a 33-year-old Palestinian and injured nine others; another 28-year-old Palestinian subsequently died of his wounds later in November.

Israeli settlement activity continues to advance, eating away at the viability of a contiguous future Palestinian State. I reiterate that all settlement activities are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace, and must immediately cease. On 5 November, Israeli authorities advanced two plans for a total of 264 housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of Ramot. The demolition and confiscation of Palestinian-owned structures also continue, with a total of 31 structures demolished or seized by the authorities, citing a lack of building permits, which are nearly impossible for Palestinians to obtain in the Israeli-controlled Area C and East Jerusalem. As a result, some 25 people were displaced and, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the livelihoods of 200 others were affected.

Meanwhile, on 4 November the Israeli authorities informed the High Court of Justice of their decision to demolish an illegal outpost comprising some dozen Israeli families that had been established in recent months in an abandoned military base in the Jordan Valley. I welcome the announcement by the Israeli authorities on 21 October to delay the demolition of Khan Al-Ahmar/Abu Al-Helu and reiterate the call of the international community for plans for the demolition of that community and all others facing similar pressures to be annulled.

On 28 and 29 October, the Palestine Liberation Organization Central Council held its thirtieth session in Ramallah. In its final statement, the Central Council reaffirmed recent decisions taken to suspend its recognition of the State of Israel until the latter

recognizes the State of Palestine, based on 4 June 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, as well as to end security coordination in all of its forms and disengage economically from Israel. A follow-up committee chaired by President Mahmoud Abbas was established to discuss the implementation of those decisions.

The situation in Lebanon will be considered by the Council this week. As we speak, the political actors have yet to find an agreement on a national unity Government. The delay hampers Lebanon's ability to address issues essential to its stability, including the economy. We again encourage all stakeholders to put national interests first and expeditiously reach an agreement that preserves Lebanon's stability and ability to deliver on its international commitments.

In closing, let make two important points.

First, on Gaza, it is vital that all stakeholders work to de-escalate the deteriorating situation and seize the current window of opportunity to advance urgent humanitarian and economic interventions, in line with the conclusions of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. I would also like to reiterate the importance of sustained support to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and extend our gratitude to the State of Kuwait for the swift disbursement of its $42 million contribution to the Agency.

Palestinian factions must seize the opportunity to engage in earnest with the Egyptian-led efforts to bring Gaza back under the control of the legitimate Palestinian Government. We in the international community must do all we can to support those efforts. Israel must also recognize that Gaza is about to explode, and in order to prevent such an explosion, people must also see a normalization of their lives, for which the closures need to be relaxed and ultimately lifted.

We cannot stand idle and allow the division between the West Bank and Gaza to be further entrenched. The Palestinian people are demanding that their leadership finally reunite Gaza and the West Bank, advance the goal of peacefully ending the Israeli occupation and establish a viable Palestinian State based on the relevant United Nations resolutions. That is what people desire; that is what they deserve.

Secondly, on the broader peace efforts, it is essential that we prevent the further collapse of the foundations that must underpin any future agreement. We must continue to consistently push back against the entrenchment of the military occupation and the erosion of international consensus on the final status issues. Together, we must work with determination and vigilance to establish an environment conducive to the return of negotiations that will end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with the recommendations of the Middle East Quartet report of 2016 (S/2016/595, annex). The United Nations remains firmly committed to advancing all efforts towards a just and lasting Israeli-Palestinian peace, based on the relevant Council resolutions.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Haley (United States of America): I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing. His presentations on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are always detailed and well-considered. But, as we have pointed out, as a survey of the threats to peace and security in the Middle East, Mr. Mladenov's briefings are, by their mandate, very incomplete. While the Council remains focused on the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, it ignores other, very serious conflicts in the Middle East.

One such conflict has in recent months come to the doorstep of Europe and the United States — that is the continued evidence of increased international terrorist activity by the Iranian regime. Iranian assassinations of political opponents are as old as the Islamic Republic itself. While United States diplomats were still being held hostage by Islamic revolutionaries in the United States embassy in Tehran, Iranian agents and proxies began a campaign of political murder in Europe, North Africa and across the Middle East.

Iranian malign behaviour does not target one country alone; it targets us all. We have seen that no more profoundly than over the past months, in which multiple European countries have publicly decried Iranian attempts to murder dissidents on their own soil. Since Mr. Mladenov's previous briefing, on 30 October Danish officials revealed a plot by Iranian intelligence agents to murder three exiled Iranian dissidents on Danish soil. The Danish Government arrested an Iranian regime assassin in Norway on 21 October. Danish officials are outraged, and rightly so. The Iranian plot was such a blatant violation of Denmark's

sovereignty that one Danish politician compared the plot to Russia's attempted poisoning of the Skripals on British soil earlier this year.

But Denmark is not the only country that has been targeted by the regime. The Danish allegations came just days after the French Government accused Iranian intelligence of plotting a bomb attack on an Iranian opposition rally in Paris in June. In that plot, a Belgian husband and wife of Iranian origin were arrested, along with a high-ranking Iranian diplomat in Austria. The diplomat provided the directions and explosives for the husband-and-wife team to bomb the Iranian resistance gathering, which included United States citizens. All three were arrested. Of course, all of that follows an Iranian-backed attack on the United States consulate in Basra, following months of the Iranian regime's violations of Iraqi national sovereignty.

Those attempts to murder their political opponents on foreign soil reflect the true nature of the Iranian regime. Those attacks are precisely the sort of behaviour that led the United States to reimpose sanctions against Iran on 5 November. That was the largest sanctions action against Iran ever undertaken by the United States. Our Administration long ago came to the conclusion that much more needed to be done if there was to be any chance to prod the Iranian Government into the community of peaceful, law-abiding nations.

We have seen the tragic legacy of appeasement before. The Council was, in many ways, created as a counter to that failed diplomatic strategy. The Tehran regime has proven itself to be the same violent and predatory group of murderers that it was in the 1980s. Our European allies are increasingly finding proof of that in their own front yards. We must unite in our efforts to stop that behaviour before it reaches more innocent people across the world.

In fairness to Mr. Mladenov, his briefing on this month's events in the Middle East did touch on the current violence in Gaza, but his reporting misses the mark when he calls for restraint from both sides. Yes, Israel launched air strikes on military posts, weapon depots and intelligence assets in Gaza, but it did so in response to the over 400 rockets and mortars that were fired indiscriminately from Gaza into Israel. Neighbourhoods were targeted. A bus was bombed by an anti-tank missile. Families were forced into bomb shelters to escape the barrage.

Even if those present accept the Hamas excuse that it launched its missiles in response to an Israeli covert operation, the fact cannot be escaped that the Gaza militants targeted civilians in response. Their actions were the actions not of a nation exercising self-defence, but of a terrorist group seizing a pretext to kill civilians. Neither can the fact be escaped that the group responsible for the rocket attacks, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, is an Iranian-supported group. Palestinian Islamic Jihad is yet another terrorist proxy that Iran calls on to stoke violence and instability in the region, and those missing facts are crucial. The fact is that there is only one side that attacks indiscriminately; one side that targets civilians; one side that terrorizes to achieve its objectives.

But I will close by agreeing with Mr. Mladenov on one point. Both sides must work to resolve the conflict in the Middle East. Neither side can get everything that it wants. Both sides must compromise, and compromise can begin only with a clear, honest and complete appraisal of the facts on the ground. Without that, this monthly discussion is doomed to fail in its objective of helping to achieve peace.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, for the painful briefing he delivered, which echoes what many among us have repeated time and again in this very Chamber — that the situation in the Gaza Strip remains on the brink of another potential destructive conflict.

There is international consensus that we need to strengthen multilateralism and the role of the United Nations, while reaffirming its role in preventing a third world war, especially in the light of the great losses in lives and property during the first two. We renew our commitment to supporting multilateral mechanisms in the face of the pressures to which they have recently been subjected. We support the Secretary-General's statement to the effect that the Security Council has dealt with the Middle East peace process in a way that has helped to diminish people's trust in the international community's ability to provide solutions. That is especially true given the fact that the Charter of the United Nations confers the authority and responsibility to deal with such crises upon the Security Council, which has allowed Israel, the occupying Power, to

continue to violate international law and disregard the Council's resolutions with impunity.

Jointly with Bolivia, last Tuesday we submitted a request for the convening of a meeting under the agenda item "Other business", given the situation on the ground and its dangerous escalation, which equals in intensity the events of the 2014 conflict, when the Israeli special forces pushed three kilometres into the Gaza Strip. That was a blatant violation and evinced a total disregard for the safety of civilians in order to commit a crime in violation of international law and international humanitarian law. The incursion led to the deaths of 14 people. Israel did not stop at that point. After it began another cycle of violence on Sunday, Israel launched widespread air strikes for two full days against various areas in the Gaza Strip, which killed unarmed Palestinian civilians and damaged civilian infrastructure.

The Israeli approach is known to all. Israel's ongoing targeting of civilians in the Gaza Strip did not begin on Sunday and will not end on Tuesday, but regrettably it is clearly escalating. Since March, the Israeli occupying forces have continued to use excessive, disproportionate and arbitrary force to target civilian demonstrators with live ammunition. Since the beginning of the Great March of Return, a total of 228 have been martyred, including 41 children, and the number of injured has exceeded 24,000 individuals, many of whom have suffered permanent disabilities. Israel's actions constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

In that regard, we reiterate our condemnation of the targeting of innocent civilians by anyone, anywhere and at any time. We hold Israel, the occupying Power, fully responsible for the acts of violence it has committed and the escalation it has caused. We call on the Security Council to implement its relevant resolutions on the protection of Palestinian civilians, especially resolutions 605 (1987) and 904 (1994), on the need to implement the Fourth Geneva Convention in the occupied Palestinian territory. Israel would not have continued to act that way — similar to what we witnessed over the past few days, with its provocative acts against the Palestinian people — if the Security Council had stood firm and united against such acts.

Once again, we reaffirm the importance of the Council's playing a complementary role to the United Nations efforts led by Mr. Mladenov. We highly value his role and that of Egypt in putting an end to those aggressive acts. We hope that those efforts will bear fruit and lead to a sustainable ceasefire and the protection of civilians in the Gaza Strip.

It is unfortunate that not only does the dangerous security situation facing civilians in the Gaza Strip threaten their safety and security, but also that the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip, now entering its eleventh year, has led to the deterioration of the humanitarian, economic, security and political situations there. As expressed clearly in the warnings issued by Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, the situation in Gaza will lead to an explosion. Half of the population in the Gaza Strip is living below the line of poverty. That is why he calls on the international community to take decisive action to address that deteriorating situation. Israel is legally and materially responsible for the crimes that it is perpetrating. We call on Israel to lift the unjust blockade against the Gaza Strip, which has led to this unprecedented and dangerous deterioration in the humanitarian situation and living conditions of Palestinian civilians. We call on the international community and international organizations to bring pressure to bear on Israel to lift its blockade of the Gaza Strip and open the crossings under its control.

Israel unfortunately continues its violations against religious sites in East Jerusalem. Every day, it organizes two rounds in which heavily armed Israeli soldiers protect Jewish settlers who break into the Al-Aqsa Mosque yards and hold religious rites. Moreover, on 25 October Israeli forces assaulted and arrested Coptic priests at the entrance of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in East Jerusalem. We renew our rejection and condemnation of all Israel's violations concerning the holy sites, especially its attempts to change the historic and legal status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and to divide it spatially and temporally, as well as to undermine the freedom of the religious rights of Muslims there.

On Wednesday, the State of Kuwait gave its donation of $42 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), represented by Mr. Peter Mulrean in New York. The State of Kuwait has provided UNRWA with a total of $50 million in assistance this year in order to enable it to provide basic services in its areas of operations with a view to alleviating the humanitarian and economic suffering of the Palestinian people. That

will help guarantee the dignity of about 5.3 million Palestinian refugees and assist over 500,000 Palestinian refugee students.

In conclusion, we emphasize our principled and steadfast position on achieving a comprehensive and just solution of the Palestinian question in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions, the principle of land for peace, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by all Arab States at the Beirut summit in 2002. That solution would be based on the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian territories to the borders of 4 June 1967 and on the resolution of all final-status issues.

The leadership, the Government and the people of the State of Kuwait fully support the Palestinian people. We pay tribute to their steadfastness and support their legitimate struggle against the Israeli occupation to acquire all their legitimate political rights, including the right to self-determination and to establish their independent State on their land with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Allow me first to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his informative briefing and for his tireless efforts and those of his team, working sometimes under very difficult circumstances.

Today, I will address three points: first, the situation in Gaza; secondly, the developments in the West Bank; and thirdly, the way forward.

First, on Gaza, we are deeply concerned by the flare-up of violence that we witnessed at the beginning of last week. We welcome the efforts of the United Nations, Egypt and others that led to an agreement to restore calm. It is now up to the parties to maintain that restoration of relative calm. All parties must exercise maximum restraint. They must refrain from any action that could provoke an escalation, that would put civilian lives at risk and that would jeopardize recent efforts towards reducing tensions and a long-term truce. We reiterate that all parties must comply with their obligations under international law. We condemn the indiscriminate firing of rockets. We reiterate that Israel must ensure that all its responses are proportionate and necessary at all times, in line with its obligations under international law.

It has been said many times that the recent escalation cannot be seen in isolation and only reminds us that a sustainable solution for Gaza is needed, as Mr. Mladenov has also just said. The humanitarian and economic situation must be improved. In that regard, the opening of crossings and easing of restrictions on the movement of goods and persons in and out of Gaza are also needed, while taking into account Israel's legitimate security concerns. We continue to express our full support for the efforts of the United Nations and Nickolay Mladenov to improve the situation in Gaza. We welcome the recent improvement in the electricity supply.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands remains committed to doing its part. Let me give three examples: first, an additional contribution of €6 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for this year; secondly, our continued investment in the Gas for Gaza project; and thirdly, through our trilateral meetings on water, energy and crossings. A sustainable solution also includes the need for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, which should result in the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza.

My second point is on the developments in the West Bank. Rising tensions and an increase in violent incidents in the West Bank, leading to the loss of life on both sides, are highly concerning. The suspension of the demolition of the community of Khan Al-Ahmar is a positive development. However, the demolition plan must be withdrawn definitively for it to no longer pose a threat to a two-State-solution. Also in that regard, we are very concerned about the announcement of new settlements in East Jerusalem and Hebron. We reiterate that settlements are illegal under international law and are a violation of resolution 2334 (2016).

That brings me to my third point, on the way forward. The current situation is a painful reminder of the lack of progress on the peace process. Yet the goal on which we all agree is bringing an end to the conflict. Positive steps are now needed for the parties to return to the negotiation table and to restart a genuine peace process leading to a two-State solution, based on the well-known parameters. That is the only way to a sustainable solution, fulfilling the aspirations of both sides.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov for his briefing and his commitment day in and day out, and to reiterate France's support for him.

Every day that passes reaffirms something that we regularly condemn before the Council: the false

status quo that we are witnessing and which in fact masks a daily deterioration of the situation, which may at any time degenerate into an open crisis, as we have once again seen in recent days in Gaza. Today, I will specifically focus on Gaza, which is once again on the brink, by highlighting three main elements.

First, between 11 and 13 November, the Gaza Strip was on the point of toppling into a new deadly conflict, such as the territory has experienced three times over the past decade. Given the potential consequences of a new conflict for the populations concerned, we join the Secretary-General in calling for calm and restraint on all sides. In a particularly tense context, we also stress the need to avoid any initiative and action likely to provoke an escalation.

Between 12 and 13 November, nearly 500 rockets were launched towards Israeli territory in less than 24 hours. The fact that there were several victims is to be condemned. The intensity of those strikes is unprecedented, even during the conflict of 2014. We have condemned in the strongest terms such firing of rockets by Hamas and other armed groups at Israeli territory.

The return to calm that we have now seen for almost a week needs to be perpetuated based on the 2014 security arrangements in order to prevent a new cycle of violence, of which the civilian populations would again be the primary victims. In that regard, we commend the efforts of Egypt and the United Nations Special Coordinator. The restraint seen since 13 November should be noted. It must be preserved regardless of the political cost for each side.

Secondly, the most recent peak in tensions, the third since the summer and the most serious, is part of a context of humanitarian collapse and political stalemate in the Gaza Strip. For more than six months, there has been a succession of violent incidents in Gaza against the backdrop of a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented severity. The number of protests that have taken place and that continue along the separation fence is terrible: 170 Palestinians killed and nearly 6,000 shot since 30 March in the context of rallies fuelled by the desperation of the population. France has condemned the disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force and called on Israel to respect the right of Palestinians to demonstrate peacefully, as well as its obligation to protect civilians under international humanitarian law. We have also condemned the manipulation of the protests by Hamas and other armed groups.

To give immediate hope to the people of Gaza, we must first address the humanitarian emergency. The efforts of the Special Coordinator and all United Nations agencies to rapidly improve the humanitarian situation contribute significantly to such a response. All actors must coordinate their efforts to that end. Ultimately, only lifting the blockade, accompanied by the necessary security guarantees for Israel, will make it possible to meet the needs of the population.

Lastly, there can be no lasting solution to the crisis in Gaza without a reconciliation agreement, which must enable the Palestinian Authority to regain all its prerogatives in the territory. We support that goal in the framework of the efforts of Egypt and the Special Coordinator. We call on all parties to resume the dialogue to relaunch the process of inter-Palestinian reconciliation, as an extension of the agreement reached in Cairo a year ago.

Let us also remember that Gaza is not a stand-alone territory and cannot be dissociated from the Palestinian question as a whole. There will be no lasting peace in the region without agreement between Israel and Palestine, no viable Israeli-Palestinian agreement without a Palestinian State, and no Palestinian State without an agreement that allows for unity between Gaza and the West Bank under the aegis of the legitimate Palestinian authorities.

Given the situation in Gaza since last March, the Security Council has never been able to speak with one voice. That deafening silence more incomprehensible by the day to the populations of the region, as it is to the world watching us.

I would like to expand on my remarks regarding the Palestinian question as a whole. Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accords and 30 years after the Algiers Declaration, we are close to the point of no return. The promise of two States threatens to fade away before our eyes, like a desert mirage. That promise is deteriorating on the ground, as a result of settlements and the political and territorial fragmentation of Palestinians. But it is also vanishing from our minds, in the absence of a political horizon. Generation after generation, despair and fatalism are overcoming Palestinians and Israelis, who live in two parallel worlds and do not talk to one another. Accordingly, the dynamics can only be negative.

Therefore this point must be hammered home: there is no viable or realistic alternative to the two-State solution. The unique territorial reality, which is taking shape before our eyes, would ultimately mean that the Palestinians give up their national aspirations and that the Israelis relinquish their democratic project. It is therefore essential to fill the current political vacuum. But I would like to remind our American friends, as the President of the Republic has said to President Trump on several occasions, that a peace plan that fails to recognize the internationally agreed parameters, particularly with regard to Jerusalem, would be condemned to failure. Those parameters are not options or a menu from which we can choose. They are the indispensable foundation of any peace plan and any future negotiations. Throwing off those parameters, in particular where it concerns Jerusalem, is to take the risk of transforming a conflict of a territorial and political nature into an identity and religious conflict, which would make any compromise impossible and open a space into which all radical groups in the region would seek to rush.

Allow me to revisit those parameters. They provide for two States living in peace and security, along safe and recognized borders, drawn on the basis of the 1967 lines, with possible territory swaps as agreed by the parties. In that respect, the decision announced last month to suspend the demolition of the Bedouin village of Khan Al-Ahmar is a first step, but one that remains tentative and revocable at all times. We therefore ask the Israeli authorities to renounce it definitively. Khan Al-Ahmar is in an area that is essential to the viability of the two-State solution.

Jerusalem would be the future capital of the two States. Nearly 600 housing units in settlements in East Jerusalem — Ramat Shlomo and Ramot — were approved earlier this month. Those advances further weaken the project of a viable, sovereign and contiguous Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital. With nearly 5,800 approvals, the year 2018 is close to reaching the record of 2012 in terms of settlements in East Jerusalem.

There must be a fair and realistic solution for Palestinian refugees. In the wait for a negotiated solution, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East plays a key role, which is crucial to preserve. The goal must be to sustain the exemplary mobilization of the international community following the United States decision to suspend its contribution to the Agency.

France is a friend to both Israelis and Palestinians. It has no other interest than peace in the region and the possibility for the populations concerned to live in safety and dignity. The events that occurred a week ago must be a warning: in Gaza as elsewhere, the same causes always produce the same effects. If we do not deal with those causes, we will not succeed indefinitely in avoiding a new conflict. We therefore have a collective responsibility within the Council to act before it is too late. France will continue to spare no effort in that regard.

Mrs. Cordova Soria (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): This is the second-to-last meeting concerning the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, that my delegation will be attending, and I have only to express the profound feeling of frustration at the almost total lack of movement towards a solution to the illegal Israeli occupation to which the Palestinian people are subject.

Although the Security Council has adopted more than 80 resolutions — 86 to be exact — that should each constitute the unequivocal certainty that the State of Israel and its allies are fully committed to peace and security in the world, we are now witnesses to the exact opposite. Let us take as an immediate reference resolution 2334 (2016), on the illegality of Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories.

An example of the expansionist policies of Israel are the demolitions in what is called Area C, or the recent threat of demolition of the buildings in the village of Khan Al-Ahmar, located in the heart of the West Bank, where approximately 250 Palestinians live. If that demolition is not permanently suspended, it will swell the lists of Palestinians men and women who are displaced from their homes. We again call on the international community, including the Security Council, not to recognize any alteration or modification to the borders established in 1967.

We have also seen in the past few weeks how Israel has increased its violent military actions against the Palestinian civilian population. Last week Israeli bombings killed seven Palestinians amid a brutal military action that, due to the disproportionate use of force and violence against the population of the Gaza strip, has been compared to the 2014 attacks. In that regard, my delegation categorically rejects the firing

of rockets into areas inhabited by civilians in Israeli territories. We deem it inadmissible that heavy artillery and lethal warfare machinery in general should be used to target places inhabited by civilians who are not part of the conflict.

During armed conflicts, it is the women and children who are most affected, even more so if they do not have the only intangible tool that can help them get out of the situations of violence that oppress them: education. It is for that reason that Bolivia has decided to endorse the Safe Schools Declaration, an instrument of a political nature that echoes our principled position and reflects our commitment and advocacy when it comes to the human right to education, on which our future and the future of children depend, particularly those who are victims of war.

In that order of priorities, we express our optimism at the announcement of the ceasefire made by the Government of Israel and Hamas militants on the side of the Gaza Strip. We hope that the praiseworthy mediation efforts that the Government of Egypt is carrying out together with the Special Coordinator will lead to the pacification of the area so that negotiations can recommence with a view to resolving tensions definitively. We cannot allow the military apparatus of the Israeli Defence Forces to continue killing innocent Palestinians, and we demand compliance with the ceasefire between the parties in the terms agreed upon in 2014.

On this occasion we again bring to the attention of the Security Council the painful humanitarian situation in Gaza. That situation has worsened as a result of the latest attacks against the Palestinian population, which has already been living under a dire Israeli blockade for almost 12 years. In that context, we express our deep concern for the nearly 20,000 people injured in Gaza during the Great March of Return, which began in March, who have still not received proper attention due to the lack of medicines or basic surgical equipment in the city's hospitals and emergency centres.

The Israeli Government must lift the blockade on the Gaza Strip, which for more than 11 years has been living under a regime of collective punishment that denies Palestinians access to water and sanitation, restricts their human rights to health care and their access to decent work and the freedom of movement. That Government is responsible for a long list of violations, which all of us in this Chamber have been witnessing month after month and year after year.

As it has done on other occasions, Bolivia demands that Israel, the occupying Power, refrain from such actions and fully comply with its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949.

We renew our firm commitment to all international efforts seeking a peaceful solution conducive to ending the situation of the Palestinian occupation. In that regard, we endorse initiatives such as the Quartet road map, the Madrid principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and others that aim to ensure a just and lasting peace so that both peoples can live within recognized and secure borders.

We reaffirm our conviction that the only long-term solution to the occupation suffered by the Palestinian people is the two-State solution, which at last provides for the establishment of a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the pre-1967 international borders and East Jerusalem as its capital, in accordance with the relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the outset, let me thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his very comprehensive and insightful briefing.

Unfortunately, despite our constant calls for de-escalation in the Middle East, there has not been any progress at all. On the contrary, last week's escalation of violence in and around Gaza resulted in casualties and many wounded. After weeks of a relatively calm period, we are facing a very alarming situation — one of the most violent escalations since the last war in Gaza, in 2014. Nearly 470 rockets were fired into Israeli territory by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad's affiliated factions. At the same time, Israel conducted approximately 70 retaliatory air strikes within the Gaza Strip.

Poland condemns in the strongest terms the rocket attacks carried out by Hamas and other militant groups from the Gaza Strip targeting civilian communities in southern Israel. There is no justification under any circumstance for indiscriminate and deliberate acts of violence against the civilian population. They are unacceptable. They must stop and never be repeated.

At the same time, Israel's response should respect the principle of proportionality and be carried out within

the framework and limits of international humanitarian law. We strongly urge the parties to exercise the utmost restraint and to refrain from any actions that may lead to further escalation. I would also like to take this opportunity to personally thank the United Nations and Special Coordinator Mladenov, as well as the Egyptian authorities, for their unprecedented efforts to put an end to the recent hostilities.

Both Israelis and Palestinians have a right to live in peace and safety. Poland supports a two-State solution, which would incorporate the national aspirations of both parties to the conflict, including the Palestinian right to self-determination and independence as well as the Israeli right to ensure its security and to normalized relations with Arab States.

On the political track, we have to acknowledge that currently the process is almost entirely blocked. That clearly influences the situation in Gaza, which is not taking place in a vacuum. We stress that the humanitarian situation of 2 million people in the Gaza Strip grows more desperate with each passing day. Limited access to basic services, including health care, and chronic energy and water sanitation crises are their daily reality on the ground. All of that could easily lead once again to an escalation of social tensions that may destabilize the situation in the region even further.

We must sustainably address the root causes and improve the situation of the people in Gaza. In order to do so, we must see progress in efforts to reunite the West Bank and Gaza under one single and legitimate Palestinian Authority. That is why we underline our strong support for the Egyptian-led efforts to achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation.

Advancing urgent infrastructure projects — as proposed by the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians — aiming to improve water, electricity and health system, and creating employment could have a quick impact on the ground. In our opinion, infrastructure remains a key element of sustainable de-escalation. The importance of practical steps is crucial, as we strongly believe that, in the absence of hope and real prospects, the inhabitants of Gaza, especially the younger generation, might resort to inflammatory rhetoric.

On the subject of youth, let me briefly touch upon the situation of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. Although the Agency recovered from major financial deficit this year, it will face the same problem in 2019. In the absence of a lasting political solution, the international community must do its utmost to ensure the continuation of the Agency's work on a sound financial basis.

Mr. Umarov (Kazakhstan): My delegation thanks Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his comprehensive and objective briefing, as always, and his unfailing commitment to the region.

First of all, we welcome the decision taken by Israel and Hamas in Gaza to observe a ceasefire based on the terms of the agreement the two sides reached in 2014. We appreciate the political will of both sides, which has resulted in the finalization of the truce. We hope that it will lead to a full-fledged peace treaty between the two sides and thereby prevent a relapse, which should be averted at all costs.

We sincerely welcome the efforts of Egypt and the United Nations since the beginning of the crisis to pull Israel and Gaza back from the brink of war and bring about some calm. Astana also appreciates the measures of the international community and different entities to secure a ceasefire. Confidence-building measures and political-diplomatic measures are at the core of our foreign policy and we always urge our partners to utilize them.

Astana encourages both sides and Member States with influence to help work towards a solution by encouraging Israel and Palestine to return to the negotiating table. Such efforts should seek to reach mutually acceptable principles for the coexistence of two States based on international law and Security Council resolutions, as well as address the blockade of the Gaza Strip, where an acute food shortage persists.

However, we are glad to learn that the fuel shipments, under the Organization's supervision, continued to flow into the Strip unhindered. It is equally essential that both parties uphold the ceasefire, exercise maximum restraint and not indulge in any hostile or provocative actions, and do so by liaising with the United Nations, Egypt and other countries of influence.

In order to do so, it is important to consolidate the Palestinian ranks together on a common Palestine Liberation Organization political platform as a necessary condition to realizing the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for their own independent State. That means paying attention to reaching intra-Palestinian

consolidation to create constructive mechanisms to resolve other problematic issues, such as unemployment and the difficult humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip.

Kazakhstan would like to underscore the responsibility of both sides to prevent an escalation of the conflict and to resume negotiations without any preconditions. My country's position remains unchanged and is very clear. It is based on the principle of two States for two peoples, with the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the creation of a free, sovereign and independent Palestinian State within the international borders of 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital. At the same time, we fully understand the aspirations of Israel to live in security. The fundamental concept, as we have always said in the Council, is rooted in the inalienable rights of Palestinians to statehood and the right of Israel to security and recognition.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank you for convening this meeting, Mr. President, and we are grateful to Mr. Mladenov for his valuable briefing.

Peru notes with deep concern that the destructive cycle between Israelis and Palestinians does not stop. Escalations of violence, such as the one occurring a week ago, are followed by periods of tense calm, which is simply an unsustainable and destabilizing scenario for the Middle East and for the international community. We continue to mourn new deaths, many of them children and young people, as well as the deteriorating security conditions for millions of Palestinians and Israelis.

We note with concern the serious impact of this vicious cycle on the prospects of resuming a political process leading to the two-State solution. The parties persist in blaming each other and in justifying their violent actions, thereby increasing mistrust and giving free reign to hate and extremist speech. We reiterate our condemnation of any attack against civilians while acknowledging the right to self-defence, which must always be guided by the principles of proportionality, precaution and distinction.

We emphasize the need for an urgent compromise between Israel and Hamas, which would allow a long-term ceasefire. We highlight the important efforts being made to that end by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General and Egypt, among other countries with influence in the region. We believe that an agreement of that type should serve to improve the tragic humanitarian conditions in Gaza, bearing in mind that the intensification of violence is often accompanied by retaliatory measures that create chaos on the civilian population.

We also consider it necessary for the Palestinian Authority to resume effective control over Gaza, with a view to improving the humanitarian situation and laying the foundations for a resumption of Palestinian-Israeli dialogue. We reiterate the need to guarantee the performance of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in providing essential services. To that end, we welcome the significant contributions recently made by countries in the region and by the European Union, which have made it possible to alleviate the shortfall in UNRWA's resources for the current year.

The prospects for a political solution are becoming increasingly unclear. It should be a cause for alarm that recent opinion polls allude to a significant reduction in the support of Israeli and Palestinian citizens for the two-State solution. Persistent and harmful practices such as settlements, property demolitions and evictions in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 undermine precisely the two-State solution and contravene resolution 2334 (2016). Those illegal practices must cease.

We also consider it imperative to reject hate speech, anti-Semitism and discrimination in all their forms. In any society, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity must be appreciated as a value, and never as a threat. We face an extremely turbulent and uncertain situation, which requires more than ever that leaders on both sides show concrete restraint, commitment to peace and respect for international law and the Charter of the United Nations.

Those efforts must necessarily be supported by the international community. The Security Council, in line with its sensitive responsibility to ensure international peace and security, cannot and must not remain silent in the face of the gravity of developments on the ground. Peru supports all efforts to reverse the cycle of destruction, address the underlying causes of this prolonged and bloody conflict and achieve the resumption of direct negotiations between the parties.

Mr. Adom (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes this briefing on the latest developments in the situation in the Middle East,

including the Palestinian question. We thank Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, whose briefing challenged us once again on the need to continue collective efforts to restore peace and stability in a region affected by numerous crises, of which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the oldest and one of the most worrisome.

The breakdown of the relative calm, followed by the resumption of violence between Israelis and Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, is a source of concern for the Security Council. In that regard, Côte d'Ivoire reaffirms its consistent position in favour of a peaceful and negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through dialogue. Therefore, we call on all parties to exercise restraint and urge them to refrain from unilateral actions that would irreparably harm the chances of a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

My country values the security of the State of Israel, just as we recognize the inalienable right to self-determination of the Palestinian people. That deep conviction is reflected in my country's continued support for the two-State solution — Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security, in accordance with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Côte d'Ivoire remains concerned about the continuing deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, in particular clashes and an increasingly unfavourable socioeconomic situation characterized by one of the world's highest youth unemployment rates, increasingly difficult access to health care, continuing water shortages and very limited electricity supply. In addition, there is irregularity in the payment of civil servants' salaries.

My country would like to express its gratitude to all State and non-State actors that, despite the obvious difficulties on the ground, are making every effort to ensure that the suffering population can maintain hope for a better tomorrow. In view of the gravity of the situation, Côte d'Ivoire calls for the mobilization of the international community to provide substantial humanitarian assistance to people in need.

In that regard, we welcome Qatar's provision of resources to supply 200 megawatts of electricity and financial assistance for the payment of salaries of Palestinian civil servants. We would also like to thank Kuwait for its multifaceted assistance to the desperate Gaza population, which is on the brink of a troubling situation. Côte d'Ivoire is also concerned about the funding difficulties facing the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and urges the United Nations and international partners to address them in order to ensure continued assistance to Palestinian refugees.

It is undeniable that the critical humanitarian situation and the risks of a major regional confrontation will be averted only if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict finds a lasting and mutually acceptable solution. Côte d'Ivoire therefore calls on the Israeli and Palestinian sides to return unconditionally to the negotiating table as part of the good offices and missions led by the United Nations.

Against that backdrop, my country supports Egypt's commendable efforts to promote reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, which will ensure the Palestinian Authority's meaningful involvement in peace negotiations and better handling of humanitarian issues in Gaza. We also welcome the ceasefire following the recent mediation by Egypt and the United Nations. We hope that this cessation of hostilities will be sustained in order to create the conditions for a resumption of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians.

In conclusion, Côte d'Ivoire affirms its support to Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, in his untiring efforts to promote a dialogue aimed at settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a key to the restoration of lasting peace and stability in the entire Middle East.

Mr. Amde (Ethiopia): I would like to express our appreciation to Special Coordinator Mladenov for his comprehensive and valuable briefing on the situation in the Middle East and the Palestinian question.

We have been closely following the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the Gaza Strip, and we are deeply concerned about these developments, which undermine the hopes for peace. We strongly support the efforts of the Secretary-General, the Special Coordinator, the Government of Egypt and others to restore calm. We welcome all attempts to reduce tension and prevent further escalation.

The deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in Gaza is extremely worrying. Essential services such as water, fuel, electricity and access to health care must be restored as soon as

possible, and we must prioritize enabling the movement of people, goods and services. It is also equally important to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation and support Egypt's efforts to bring the Gaza Strip under the Palestinian Authority's control, as laid down in the 1994 Cairo Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. It is vital that all sides exercise maximum restraint and work to de-escalate the tension to avoid continuing to endanger the lives of innocent civilians. Any escalation merely undermines efforts to improve the lives of Palestinians and support the return of the Palestinian Authority to Gaza.

It is self-evident that unless the peace process is advanced and the underlying problems are resolved peacefully, this latest tragedy will only be repeated and the situation will once again move rapidly towards a point of no return. It is critical that we find ways and means to limit the damage and to work, however difficult it may be, to continue the peace process and save the two-State formula. That is the long-held position of the United Nations and the international community. There is no doubt that it is still the best and the only realistic option for the future. Of course, the same underlying problems and obstacles to peace persist. There has been little or no sign of movement, and the present situation is hardly conducive to sustainable peace or security for either party. It is clear that genuine efforts to remove the obstacles are a prerequisite for any meaningful progress towards realizing a two-State solution. In other words, it is essential to ensure that direct negotiations between the parties are resumed without preconditions or delays. The international community as a whole, and the Security Council in particular, must put their full weight behind this and do it as quickly as possible. The sooner that happens, the better it will be for both Israelis and Palestinians, and indeed the entire region.

Mr. Safronkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to Mr. Mladenov for his briefing on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. That is the way the agenda item we developed together is written, so let us abide by it.

We deplore the fact that the status quo in the occupied Palestinian territories, the epicentre of the potential for conflict in the Middle East, is untenable, consisting as it does of an endless series of crises. The result is that it blocks any movement towards achieving a comprehensive, sustainable Arab-Israeli settlement and resolution of the Palestinian question on internationally recognized foundations, which include the relevant Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid principles, including the principle of land for peace, and the two-State formula, which provides for the creation through negotiations of a State of Palestine coexisting in peace and security with Israel.

Against a backdrop — repudiated by the entire international community — of aggressive revision of agreements previously arrived at, including in the Security Council, any prospects for a resumption of the negotiation process are receding. The gulf of misunderstanding and mistrust between Palestinians and Israelis is widening. What is now front and centre is not the call for peace and peaceful initiatives but violence, unilateral measures and provocative rhetoric. In the Gaza Strip, where only recently much effort had succeeded in creating a relative lull, the tensions have not subsided. A willingness to show restraint must be maintained. Actions resulting in civilian casualties and the destruction of civilian facilities in the Gaza Strip and in Israel should be firmly condemned.

Considering the current worsening of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, we have been urging the parties to immediately end hostilities. We appreciate and support the mediation efforts of Egypt and the United Nations to restore the ceasefire. We hope it will be sustainable and long-term, that it will enable the international community to mobilize efforts to improve the dismal humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and focus on advancing the political process. Of course, we particularly emphasize that any assistance to the Gaza Strip should be carried out in close coordination with the legitimate Palestinian authorities, led by President Abbas, and should conform to the goal of restoring Palestinian unity.

We urgently need to mobilize our collective diplomacy in order to prevent the failure of the efforts that all of us in the international community have made together to establish the conditions for implementing the only viable solution there is, a two-State solution based on direct negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis. It is through the direct dialogue format that we can work to find answers to all final status issues, including those regarding Jerusalem, refugees, borders and all the security issues that are crucial to the region. These sensitive issues cannot just be taken off the negotiating table before the parties can discuss them.

If they are not settled, they will still surface as painful shocks for everyone.

The policy of creating faits accomplis on the ground in an attempt to anticipate the outcome of a bilateral discussion of these issues is not acceptable. We consider the expansion of Israeli settlements, the demolition of Palestinian property and the eviction of Palestinian families illegal, in contravention of international law and detrimental to a two-State solution. The holding of municipal elections in the occupied Syrian Golan by Israeli authorities is equally unacceptable and illegitimate. This dangerous step, which violates more than one Council resolution, could have far-reaching negative consequences for a Middle East settlement as a whole.

Russia's position remains consistent. We maintain and develop relations with all the States in the region based on a positive agenda. We support a resumption of active efforts by the Middle East Quartet of international mediators, which is still the only mediation format approved by Security Council resolutions. Russia's proposal for hosting a summit between the leaders of Palestine and Israel is still on the table, and we want to point out that the Palestinian leader has repeatedly confirmed his agreement with that initiative. We will continue our financial and political assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA's work is vital, as it has an important stabilizing effect in the Palestinian territories and the countries of the Middle East. It must be able to survive and function fully.

In conclusion, we want to once again urge our colleagues in the Council to refrain from making threats and unfounded accusations, and instead do the essential work of strengthening the overall atmosphere of trust in the Security Council, the Near and Middle East and North Africa and to abandon policies of confrontation once and for all. Israelis, Palestinians, Saudis and Iranians all deserve to live in prosperity and security, but if that goal is to be achieved, the regional security architecture must be comprehensive and indivisible, and diplomacy and dialogue channels must be brought to bear. We believe that Russia's security concept for the Persian Gulf constitutes a good basis for launching efforts in that direction. History has shown us that we can succeed in the Middle East only when we work together according to the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States.

Mr. Clay (United Kingdom): I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

The United Kingdom is deeply concerned about the recent violence in Gaza and Israel, including the civilian casualties. We must do everything we can to avoid another devastating war, which would compound the already awful humanitarian and security conditions that ordinary Gazans face and further threaten the security of Israeli border communities. We urge all parties to show restraint, and we welcome the return to calm of the past few days. We strongly support the mediation efforts of the international community led by Egypt and the United Nations, and urge for talks to continue aimed at achieving enduring peace in Gaza under the control of the Palestinian Authority.

We strongly condemn the firing of projectiles from Gaza towards Israel. Our Ambassador to Israel visited communities affected by the rocket fire on Tuesday. Hamas and other factions must end such attacks immediately. The recent deaths on both sides of the conflict are alarming. In order to protect civilians, it is crucial to ensure that a ceasefire is agreed on and maintained as part of a political process that sees the Palestinian Authority return to Gaza and the restrictions on the Gazan people and economy lifted. As Mr. Mladenov made clear today, no effort must be spared to reverse the spiral of violence. The cycle of conflict in Gaza has gone on for too long and the civilian populations in Gaza and Israel have suffered the consequences. We call on Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and Israel to refrain from any action that could lead to further deterioration.

We remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in Gaza and have been holding frequent discussions with the Government of Israel about the importance of easing its restrictions on Gaza. The United Kingdom welcomes the recent efforts to improve the humanitarian situation, especially the increase in the supply of electricity from between four to six hours to 12 hours a day, and the Palestinian Authority's continued payment of salaries and other costs. As others have done, we also welcome the recent contributions that have been made to close the funding gap for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, and we reiterate the United Kingdom's support for the Agency.

If the situation in Gaza is to improve, it requires political resolve. The October 2017 reconciliation

agreement was a good start, but now all the Palestinian factions must work together to implement an agreement. We strongly support the efforts of Egypt, the Special Coordinator and the wider international community to achieve that. The United Kingdom will continue to urge the parties to prioritize progress towards reaching a durable solution for Gaza and to take the necessary practical steps to ensure Gaza's reconstruction and economic recovery. That is the only way to improve the living standards of ordinary Palestinians in Gaza and guarantee Israel's long-term security.

In conclusion, the people of Israel and Gaza have the right to live without constant fear for their security, and both peoples have the right to live safely and in peace. Urgent steps must be taken now to address the underlying causes of the conflicts. It is in everyone's interest for peace and stability to prevail in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories. Now more than ever we need a political process that delivers a two-State solution.

Mr. Esono Mbengono (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov for his excellent briefing. We would also like to pay tribute to the major efforts that he and his team are carrying out in the region.

We are quickly approaching the end of 2018, a year in which we have had several occasions to address this important issue, which we believe is still of enormous importance to all of us, considering that it is a focus of the media, an issue of concern to the entire international community and a decisive factor in the stability of the region.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea is extremely concerned about the incidents in recent weeks in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza involving hostile exchanges between the Israeli army and Hamas militants, which have led to the loss of human lives and caused many injuries and extensive material damage. In that regard, we call on the parties to refrain from unilateral actions and provocations and emphasize that any incitement to violence must be condemned.

Since it began, this conflict has caused enormous damage to the parties, many measures have been taken to prevent it and find a solution, and massive amounts of money have been spent. But the reality is that the results achieved so far have shown us that while much has been done, it has not been enough to find a solution to the sad coexistence of Israelis and Palestinians. Palestinians' lives are becoming increasingly miserable, unstable and insecure, while for its part Israel cannot easily ensure its people's security, owing to the border activity between Palestine and its settlers — and all those factors and more have created an atmosphere of detachment and insecurity in the countries of the region.

Despite the Council's efforts over the seven decades it has spent considering this issue, the pain and sorrow of the conflicting parties have continued to grow. In that regard, we regret that the moments in the history of the situation that gave hope to the whole world have been nothing but a waste of paper. However, we still believe that it is vital and urgent to continue coordinating our efforts aimed to find a diplomatic way to encourage the parties to return to the negotiating table. We believe that ensuring that all Council members are united on the issue is crucial in that regard, considering the influence and strategic importance of some of its members in the world generally and the Middle East in particular.

For its part, Equatorial Guinea would like to reaffirm its position, based on the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid peace principles, the Quartet road map and other instruments, that the Palestinian claims are just and that Israel has the right to live in peace and security. We therefore reiterate our support for a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, based on negotiations between the parties that ensure the two States' safe and peaceful coexistence and harmony with the other States of the region.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our call concerning the importance of continuing to work for intra-Palestinian reconciliation, bearing in mind that the exchange of accusations of non-compliance with the commitments in the reconciliation agreement signed in October last year between Hamas and Fatah has called into question its consideration and implementation. However, we hope that the efforts initiated by Egypt and other international partners will achieve the desired results. Lastly, we are grateful for the statements that various countries have made in recent months in support of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East urging other States to join in that gesture of solidarity.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I am honoured by the presence here today of Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden. I would like to

start by thanking Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing and welcome his strong engagement on the issue, including in the recent efforts to prevent another conflict in Gaza.

The vision of the international community remains unchanged. It is one that sees Israel and Palestine, side by side in peace and security, with Jerusalem as the future capital of two States and home to three world religions, in a two-State solution that resolves all final status issues. Every month, however, we reflect on the continuing deterioration of the situation on the ground, which seriously hampers the hopes for a two-State solution. Whether it is the continued Israeli occupation and illegal settlement expansion; threats of demolitions and evictions of villages such as Khan Al-Ahmar in Area C; violence in and around Gaza, including the recent firing of rockets, as well as incitement, hatred and violence; or actions that shrink the space for civil society, the parties have a responsibility to reverse those negative trends.

Last week we witnessed another dangerous outbreak of violence in and around Gaza. We condemn the firing of rockets against Israel by Hamas and other militant groups, and regret the loss of life on both sides. While recognizing Israel's legitimate security concerns, we underline that the Israeli response must be proportionate. In the past seven months, approximately 200 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and more than 24,000 injured. We all know that another full-fledged conflict would be an immense tragedy.

We commend Egypt for its mediation efforts. But while calm has been restored for now, that is only temporary relief. The situation for the people in Gaza is untenable. It is a humanitarian catastrophe affecting 2 million people without freedom to move to or from Gaza. If we do not address the situation there holistically, a new flare-up of violence will be just around the corner. As we have repeatedly stated, there is an urgent need for, first, concrete humanitarian interventions with a quick, direct and immediate impact on daily lives that can alleviate the suffering; secondly, the easing of restrictions and improvement of access and movement to and from Gaza, including for all donors, with the aim of ending Gaza's closure; and lastly, steps that can further Palestinian reconciliation and enable the Palestinian Authority's return to Gaza. We support the Egyptian-led efforts to achieve reconciliation, and we call on all Palestinian factions to engage genuinely to that end. Only reconciliation can lead to a united Palestinian leadership and a reunification of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The Council has a responsibility to actively contribute beyond these regular meetings, and Sweden has made concrete proposals to that effect.

We need to show the so-called post-Oslo generation that there is an alternative to conflict, violence and a constant deterioration on the ground, and the voices of young Israelis and Palestinians must be heard and listened to, in line with resolution 2419 (2018). Israel and Palestine have a responsibility to build peaceful and inclusive societies, particularly with the meaningful participation of women and young people. The shrinking space for civil society, along with the negative human rights developments, is a source of great concern. On the Palestinian side, laws are used to curtail freedom of expression. On the Israeli side, representatives of civil-society organizations are delegitimized, which limits them in their efforts to do their important work. We call on the Palestinian and Israeli leaderships to support and respect members of civil society and allow them to operate and express their views freely.

We cannot let the viability of a two-State solution move out of reach. Action is urgently needed if we are to avoid the risk of ending up not only in perpetual occupation but in a one-State reality, which was the reason for the Council's adoption almost two years ago of resolution 2334 (2016). We look forward to the Secretary-General's latest report next month, with a view to having a more thorough examination of its implementation. We must do everything in our power to make sure that the hope of two States is kept alive and that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, based on international law, the relevant United Nations resolutions and previous agreements, is realized.

The President (*spoke in Chinese*): On behalf of the members of the Council, I welcome King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden to the Security Council.

I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of China.

I thank Special Coordinator Mladenov for his briefing.

China has been closely following the current tensions in Gaza, and is deeply concerned and distressed about the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Gaza Strip and the resulting casualties.

The use of force, and of efforts to halt violence with violence, does not help to solve problems. China appreciates the mediation efforts of Egypt and the United Nations and calls on both sides of the conflict to meet halfway, end their military actions and work to effectively promote the easing of tensions. Based on the interests of preserving their peoples' safety and maintaining peace and stability in the region, all the parties should exercise restraint in order to avoid the escalation of tensions. China has consistently advocated for resolving the Palestinian-Israeli dispute through peaceful negotiations, and we oppose any violence that exacerbates tensions or targets civilians. The Security Council and the relevant parties must focus on the long term and strive to create the conditions necessary for promoting stability and resuming dialogue. The international community should ramp up its sense of urgency, fully implement the relevant General Assembly resolutions and protect Palestinian civilians in a joint effort to bring the Palestinian issue back to the negotiation track in order to reach a settlement. I would like to highlight the following points.

First, a two-State solution is fundamental to resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community should step up its mediation efforts, while adhering to the relevant United Nations resolutions, the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative. All the parties concerned should work to effectively implement resolution 2334 (2016), stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories, cease the demolition of Palestinian houses and the destruction of Palestinian property, and take measures to prevent violence against civilians. Secondly, promoting a resumption of the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks is a shared goal of the work of the international community. The international community and the Security Council should embrace an elevated sense of urgency and responsibility by launching a new round of efforts to promote peace. All parties that have significant influence with regard to the Middle East issue should play a constructive role in exploring new mediation mechanisms and breaking the impasse facing Palestinian-Israeli peace talks sooner rather than later. Thirdly, the final status of Jerusalem is key to advancing the Middle East peace process. That issue is as complex as it is sensitive, and it concerns the future of a two-State solution, as well as regional peace and tranquillity.

All the parties should be cautious when dealing with related issues, refraining from imposing solutions lest they trigger new confrontations. They should uphold the principle of respect for diverse histories, maintaining justice and fairness, implementing international consensus and achieving peaceful coexistence and, based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and international consensus, work to reach a negotiated solution that accommodates the interests of all.

I want to reiterate that China has always been committed to advancing the Middle East peace process, supporting the just cause of the Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate national rights and the establishment of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian State, based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. The international community should step up its support for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. China will continue to follow the four-point proposal of President Xi Jinping for promoting a political settlement of the Palestinian issue, and we stand ready to work with the relevant parties and the international community to play a positive and constructive role in achieving peace in the Middle East.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.